EPA & Hydraulic Fracturing - Jan. 17

Date	HeadLine	Outlet
01/17/2013	EPA changed course after gas company protested	Oxford Press - Online
01/17/2013	EPA dropped investigation after driller protested	Daily Journal - Online, The
01/17/2013	Mead disappointed by new EPA Pavillion extension	Seattle Post-Intelligencer
01/17/2013	Did EPA back off on 'fracking' risk because of pressure from industry?	Mail Tribune - Online
01/17/2013	Pressured by Gas Company, EPA Halted Fracking Investigation	Daily Banter, The
01/17/2013	Urge Ireland to Ban Harmful Fracking ! PLEASE SIGN ! !	Care2 News Network
01/17/2013	EPA Changed Course on Drilling Investigation After Gas Company Protested	Construction.com
01/17/2013	EPA changed course after gas company gripe	Worcester Telegram & Gazette - Online
01/17/2013	Obama's EPA Shuts Down Damning Fracking Study	CounterPunch - Online
01/17/2013	EPA changed course after gas company protested	KHOU-TV - Online
01/17/2013	EPA changed course after gas company protested	WSLS-TV - Online
01/17/2013	EPA changed course after gas company protested	Advocate - Online, The
01/17/2013	CU-Boulder, NOAA study uncovers oil and gas emission's 'chemical signature'	Colorado Daily - Online
01/17/2013	EPA changed course after gas company protested	Deseret News - Online
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01/17/2013	EPA changed course after gas company protests	Dickinson Press - Online
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01/17/2013	Mead joins Encana, landowners in disappointment about latest EPA extension for Pavillion study	Daily Journal - Online
01/17/2013	EPA changed course after gas company protested	KRGV-TV - Online
01/17/2013	EPA changed course after oil company protested | Star-Gazette | stargazette.com	Star-Gazette - Online
01/17/2013	Mead disappointed by new EPA Pavillion extension	WJAC-TV - Online
01/17/2013	EPA changed course after gas company protested	State Journal - Online, The
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01/17/2013	EPA changed course after gas company protested	WCBD-TV - Online
01/17/2013	EPA changed course after gas company protested	Gateway News - Online
01/17/2013	EPA backed off drilling probe into foul water	Pittsburgh Post-Gazette - Online

01/17/2013	AP: EPA Buried Fracking Evidence at Drilling Company's Behest	Truthdig
01/17/2013	EPA changed course after oil company protested	Salon.com
01/17/2013	EPA changed course after gas company protested	Boston.com
01/17/2013	EPA changed course after gas company protested	WNCT-TV - Online
01/17/2013	EPA changed course after gas company protested	Dayton Daily News - Online
01/17/2013	Obama EPA Shut Down Study on Fracking Water Contamination in Texas	DAILY KOS
01/17/2013	EPA BACKED OFF DRILLING PROBE INTO FOUL WATER	Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

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EPA changed course after gas company protested
Oxford Press - Online

01/17/2013

In this Nov. 26, 2012 photo, Steve Lipsky demonstrates how his well water ignites when he puts a flame to the flowing well spigot outside his family's home in rural Parker County near Weatherford, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence a gas company's drilling operation contaminated Lipsky's drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving the family with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions. (AP Photo/LM Otero)

In this Nov. 27, 2012 photo, a well vent burns as water flows from Steve Lipsky's well outside his family's home in rural Parker County near Weatherford, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence a gas company's drilling operation contaminated Lipsky's drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving the family with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or ìfracking,î operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions. (AP Photo/LM Otero)

In this Nov. 26, 2012 photo, Steve Lipsky pauses during an interview at his family's home in rural Parker County near Weatherford, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence a gas company's drilling operation contaminated Lipsky's drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving the family with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions. (AP Photo/LM Otero)

In this Nov. 26, 2012 photo, Steve Lipsky pauses during an interview at his family's home in rural Parker County near Weatherford, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence a gas company's drilling operation contaminated Lipsky's drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving the family with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or ìfracking,î operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions. (AP Photo/LM Otero)

This Dec. 6, 2012 aerial photo shows a natural gas well, top, in rural Parker County near Granbury, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence the gas company's drilling operation contaminated nearby drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving households with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions.

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(AP Photo/LM Otero)

In a Nov. 26, 2012 photo, a road leads to a natural gas well near Weatherford, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence the gas company's drilling operation contaminated nearby families' drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving the families with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions. (AP Photo/LM Otero)

In this Nov. 27, 2012 photo, water flowing from Steve Lipsky's well ignites when he puts a flame to the well spigot outside his family's home in rural Parker County near Weatherford, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence a gas company's drilling operation contaminated Lipsky's drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving the family with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions. (AP Photo/LM Otero)

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At first, the Environmental Protection Agency believed the situation was so serious that it issued a rare emergency order in late 2010 that said at least two homeowners were in immediate danger from a well saturated with flammable methane. More than a year later, the agency rescinded its mandate and refused to explain why.

Now a confidential report obtained by The Associated Press and interviews with company representatives show that the EPA had scientific evidence against the driller, Range Resources, but changed course after the company threatened not to cooperate with a national study into a common form of drilling called hydraulic fracturing. Regulators set aside an analysis that concluded the drilling could have been to blame for the contamination.

For Steve Lipsky, the EPA decision seemed to ignore the dangers to his family. His water supply contains so much methane that the gas in water flowing from a pipe connected to the well can be ignited.

"I just can't believe that an agency that knows the truth about something like that, or has evidence like this, wouldn't use it," said Lipsky, who fears he will have to abandon his dream home in an upscale neighborhood of Weatherford.

The case isn't the first in which the EPA initially linked a hydraulic fracturing operation to water contamination and then softened its position after the industry protested.

A similar dispute unfolded in west-central Wyoming in late 2011, when the EPA released an initial report that showed hydraulic fracturing could have contaminated groundwater. After industry and GOP leaders went on the attack, the agency said it had decided to do more testing. It has yet to announce a final conclusion.

Hydraulic fracturing — often called "fracking" — allows drillers to tap into oil and gas reserves that were once considered out of reach because they were locked in deep layers of rock.

The method has contributed to a surge in natural gas drilling nationwide, but environmental activists and some scientists believe it can contaminate groundwater. The industry insists the practice is safe.

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Range Resources, a leading independent player in the natural gas boom, has hundreds of gas wells throughout Texas, Pennsylvania and other mineral-rich areas of the United States. Among them is a production site — now owned by Legend Natural Gas — in a wooded area about a mile from Lipsky's home in Weatherford, about a half-hour drive west of Fort Worth.

State agencies usually regulate water and air pollution, so the EPA's involvement in the Texas matter was unusual from the start. The EPA began investigating complaints about the methane in December 2010, because it said the Texas Railroad Commission, which oversees oil and gas drilling, had not responded quickly enough to the reports of bubbling water.

Government scientists believed two families, including the Lipskys, were in danger from methane and cancer-causing benzene and ordered Range Resources to take steps to clean their water wells and provide affected homeowners with safe water. The company stopped doing that after state regulators declared in March 2011 that Range Resources was not responsible. The dispute between the EPA and the company then moved into federal court.

Believing the case was headed for a lengthy legal battle, the EPA asked an independent scientist named Geoffrey Thyne to analyze water samples taken from 32 water wells. In the report obtained by the AP, Thyne concluded from chemical testing that the gas in the drinking water could have originated from Range Resources' nearby drilling operation.

Meanwhile, the EPA was seeking industry leaders to participate in a national study into hydraulic fracturing. Range Resources told EPA officials in Washington that so long as the agency continued to pursue a "scientifically baseless" action against the company in Weatherford, it would not take part in the study and would not allow government scientists onto its drilling sites, said company attorney David Poole.

In March 2012, the EPA retracted its emergency order, halted the court battle and set aside Thyne's report showing that the gas in Lipsky's water was nearly identical to the gases the Plano, Texas-based company was producing.

"They said that they would look into it, which I believe is exactly what they did," Poole said. "I'm proud of them. As an American, I think that's exactly what they should have done."

The EPA offered no public explanation for its change in thinking, and Lipsky said he and his family learned about it from a reporter. The agency refused to answer questions about the decision, instead issuing a statement by email that said resolving the Range Resources matter allowed the EPA to shift its "focus in this case away from litigation and toward a joint effort on the science and safety of energy extraction."

After the agency dropped its action, the company offered scientists access to a site in southwestern Pennsylvania. But the EPA has not yet accepted the offer.

Rob Jackson, chairman of global environmental change at Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment, reviewed Thyne's report and the raw data upon which it was based. He agreed the gas in Lipsky's well could have originated in a rock formation known as the Barnett shale, the same area where Range Resources was extracting gas.

Jackson said it was "premature" to withdraw the order and said the EPA "dropped the ball in dropping their investigation." Two of the wells included in Thyne's report had water containing more than the 10 milligrams per liter of methane, or enough to be deemed hazardous by the EPA. One had 35 milligrams per liter, which Jackson called "particularly high" and an amount that federal regulators say is more than what requires immediate action.

"Two of the homes had methane within the action level for hazard mitigation, one of them well above this hazard threshold," Jackson said.

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Lipsky, who is still tied up in a legal battle with Range Resources, now pays about $1,000 a month to haul water to his home. He, his wife and three children become unnerved when their methane detectors go off. Sometime soon, he said, the family will have to decide whether to stay in the large stone house or move.

"This has been total hell," Lipsky said. "It's been taking a huge toll on my family and on our life."

The confidential report relied on a type of testing known as isotopic analysis, which produces a unique chemical fingerprint that sometimes allows researchers to trace the origin of gas or oil.

Jackson, who studies hydraulic fracturing and specializes in isotopic analysis, acknowledged that more data is needed to determine for certain where the gas came from. But even if the gas came from elsewhere, Range Resources' drilling could have contributed to the problem in Lipsky's water because gas migrates, he added.

The company insists the gas in Lipsky's water is from natural migration and not drilling. Range Resources' testing indicates the gas came from a different rock formation called Strawn shale and not the deeper Barnett shale, Poole said.

In addition, he said, isotopic analysis cannot be used in this case because the chemical makeup of the gases in the two formations is indistinguishable. A Range Resources spokesman also dismissed Thyne and Jackson as anti-industry.

Range Resources has not shared its data with the EPA or the Railroad Commission. Poole said the data is proprietary and could only be seen by Houston-based Weatherford Laboratories, where it originated. It was analyzed for Range Resources by a Weatherford scientist, Mark McCaffrey, who did not respond to requests for an interview.

Gas has always been in the water in that area, Poole said. And years before Range Resources began drilling, at least one water well in the neighborhood contained so much methane, it went up in flames.

At another home with dangerously high methane levels in the water, the company insisted the gas had been there since the well was first dug many years ago. The homeowner was not aware of anything wrong until Range Resources began drilling in 2009.

Jackson said it was "unrealistic" to suggest that people could have tainted water and not notice.

"It bubbles like champagne or mineral waters," he said. "The notion that people would have wells and have this in their water and not see this is wrong."

Associated Press writers Nomaan Merchant in Dallas, Allen Breed in Raleigh, N.C., and Michael Rubinkam in Allentown, Pa., contributed to this report.

Plushnick-Masti can be followed on Twitter at https://twitter.com/RamitMastiAP

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EPA dropped investigation after driller protested
Daily Journal - Online, The

01/17/2013

Range Resources said it wouldn't assist government in study on industry

Water flowing from Steve Lipsky's well ignites when he puts a flame to the well spigot outside his family's home near Weatherford, Texas. / LM Otero/AP

The Environmental Protection Agency had evidence a gas company's drilling operation contaminated Steve Lipsky's drinking water, but withdrew its enforcement action. / LM Otero/AP

The case isn t the first in which the EPA initially linked a hydraulic fracturing operation to water contamination and then softened its position after the industry protested.

A similar dispute unfolded in west-central Wyoming in late 2011, when the EPA released an initial report that showed hydraulic fracturing could have contaminated groundwater. After industry and GOP leaders went on the attack, the agency said it had decided to do more testing. It has yet to announce a final conclusion.

WEATHERFORD, TEXAS — When a man in a Fort Worth suburb reported his family s drinking water had begun bubbling like champagne, the federal government sounded an alarm: An oil company may have tainted their wells while drilling for natural gas.

At first, the Environmental Protection Agency believed the situation was so serious that it issued a rare emergency order in late 2010 that said at least two homeowners were in immediate danger from a well saturated with flammable methane. More than a year later, the agency rescinded its mandate and refused to explain why.

Now a confidential report obtained by The Associated Press and interviews with company representatives show that the EPA had scientific evidence against the driller, Range Resources, but changed course after the company threatened not to cooperate with a national study into a common form of drilling called hydraulic fracturing.

Regulators set aside an analysis that concluded the drilling could have been to blame for the contamination.

For Steve Lipsky, the EPA decision seemed to ignore the dangers of his well. His water supply contains so much methane that the gas in water flowing from a pipe connected to the well can be ignited.

I just can t believe that an agency that knows the truth about something like that, or has evidence like this, wouldn t use it, said Lipsky.

Hydraulic fracturing often called fracking allows drillers to tap into oil and gas reserves that were once considered out of reach because they were locked in deep layers of rock.

The method has contributed to a surge in natural gas drilling nationwide, but environmental activists and some scientists believe it can contaminate groundwater. The industry insists the practice is safe.

Range Resources, a leading company in the natural gas boom, has hundreds of gas wells throughout Texas, Pennsylvania and other mineral-rich areas of the United States.

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Among them is a production site now owned by Legend Natural Gas in a wooded area about a mile from Lipsky s home in Weatherford, about a half-hour drive west of Fort Worth.

The EPA began investigating complaints about the methane in December 2010, because it said the Texas Railroad Commission, which oversees oil and gas drilling, had not responded quickly enough to the reports of bubbling water.

Government scientists believed two families, including the Lipskys, were in danger from methane and cancer-causing benzene and ordered Range Resources to take steps to clean their water wells and provide affected homeowners with safe water.

The company stopped doing that after state regulators declared in March 2011 that Range Resources was not responsible. The dispute between the EPA and the company then moved into federal court.

Believing the case was headed for a lengthy legal battle, the EPA asked an independent scientist named Geoffrey Thyne to analyze water samples taken from 32 water wells. In the report obtained by the AP, Thyne concluded from chemical testing that the gas in the drinking water could have originated from Range Resources nearby drilling operation.

Meanwhile, the EPA was seeking industry leaders to participate in a national study into hydraulic fracturing. Range Resources told EPA officials in Washington that so long as the agency continued to pursue a scientifically baseless action against the company in Weatherford, it would not take part in the study, said company attorney David Poole.

In March 2012, the EPA retracted its emergency order, halted the court battle and set aside Thyne s report.

They said that they would look into it, which I believe is exactly what they did, Poole said.

The EPA offered no public explanation for its change in thinking.

Rob Jackson, chairman of global environmental change at Duke University s Nicholas School of the Environment, reviewed Thyne s report and agreed the gas in Lipsky s well could have originated in a rock formation known as the Barnett shale, the same area where Range Resources was extracting gas.

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Range Resources insists the gas in Lipsky s water is from natural migration and not drilling. Its testing indicates the gas came from a different rock formation, Poole said.

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Mead disappointed by new EPA Pavillion extension
Seattle Post-Intelligencer

01/17/2013

By MEAD GRUVER, Associated Press

CHEYENNE, Wyo. (AP) — Gov. Matt Mead has joined those expressing disappointment that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has extended for a third time a public comment period on a report on groundwater pollution in a Wyoming gas field rather than moving toward wrapping up the study.

The comment period was supposed to end Tuesday. Last week, the EPA announced it would be extended to Sept. 30. That could postpone independent experts' formal review of the December, 2011, report by another eight months or more.

"Wyoming did not ask for this delay nor do we want it. This does not move us toward resolving the concerns of the landowners in the area," Mead said in a statement released Wednesday.

The report on the EPA's findings in the Pavillion area marked the first time the federal agency blamed hydraulic fracturing for a specific case of groundwater pollution. Fracking involves pumping water, sand and chemicals into oil and gas wells to fracture open rock formations and increase the flow of oil and gas.

The report widened the gap between environmentalists who characterize fracking as a threat to clean groundwater and petroleum industry officials who insist fracking is safe. Both sides agree on one thing: The comment period extension is unnecessary.

Doug Hock, spokesman for Calgary-based Encana, which owns the gas field in the Pavillion area in west-central Wyoming, said by email: "There's no credible reason for further delay."

Those with polluted well water "continue to suffer the effects of living in a contaminated environment" while peer review is delayed, John Fenton, chairman of the group Pavillion Area Concerned Citizens, said in a release last week.

Contacted by email Wednesday, EPA Region 8 spokesman Rich Mylott would not respond to the governor's remarks. He also did not answer a question about the EPA's plans for peer review of the report.

He reiterated part of a prepared statement the EPA released to reporters who asked about the extension.

"The Agency will take into account new data, further stakeholder input, and public comment as it continues to review the status of the Pavillion investigation and considers options for moving forward," Mylott wrote, adding that he had no more information to provide.

The comment period began on Dec. 14, 2011, and was extended twice last year.

The first extension was last March, after the state and EPA agreed to collaborate on further groundwater testing. The second extension was in October, soon after those new test results — which were similar to the results of EPA's earlier testing — came out.

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Did EPA back off on 'fracking' risk because of pressure from industry?
Mail Tribune - Online

01/17/2013

Agency had strong evidence linking driller's 'fracking' method to contaminated groundwater, but didn't follow through

WEATHERFORD, Texas — When a man in a Fort Worth suburb reported his family's drinking water had begun bubbling like champagne, the federal government sounded an alarm: A company may have tainted their wells while drilling for natural gas.

At first, the Environmental Protection Agency believed the situation was so serious that it issued a rare emergency order in late 2010 that said at least two homeowners were in immediate danger from a well saturated with flammable methane. More than a year later, the agency rescinded its mandate and refused to explain why.

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For Steve Lipsky, the EPA decision seemed to ignore the dangers to his family. His water supply contains so much methane that the gas in water flowing from a pipe connected to the well can be ignited.

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Pressured by Gas Company, EPA Halted Fracking Investigation
Daily Banter, The

01/17/2013

In this Nov. 26, 2012 photo, Steve Lipsky demonstrates how his well water ignites when he puts a flame to the flowing well spigot outside his family's home in rural Parker County near Weatherford, Texas.(Photo: LM Otero, AP)

The Daily Banter Headline Grab. From AP:

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Urge Ireland to Ban Harmful Fracking ! PLEASE SIGN ! !
Care2 News Network

01/17/2013

60

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Recently, the Irish Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) placed a ban on fracking, or hydraulic fracturing, until a thorough environmental study could be completed. The ban forbids oil companies from beginning fracking procedures until there is evidence

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EPA & Hydraulic Fracturing - Jan. 17

EPA Changed Course on Drilling Investigation After Gas Company Protested Construction.com

01/17/2013

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A similar dispute unfolded in west-central Wyoming in late 2011, when the EPA released an initial report that showed hydraulic fracturing could have contaminated groundwater. After industry and GOP leaders went on the attack, the agency said it had decided to do more testing. It has yet to announce a final conclusion.

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Believing the case was headed for a lengthy legal battle, the EPA asked an independent scientist named Geoffrey Thyne to analyze water samples taken from 32 water wells. In the report obtained by the AP, Thyne concluded from chemical testing that the gas in the drinking water could have originated from Range Resources' nearby drilling operation.

Meanwhile, the EPA was seeking industry leaders to participate in a national study into hydraulic fracturing. Range Resources told EPA officials in Washington that so long as the agency continued to pursue a "scientifically baseless" action against the company in Weatherford, it would not take part in the study and would not allow government scientists onto its drilling sites, said company attorney David Poole.

In March 2012, the EPA retracted its emergency order, halted the court battle and set aside Thyne's report showing that the gas in Lipsky's water was nearly identical to the gases the Plano, Texas-based company was producing.

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The EPA offered no public explanation for its change in thinking, and Lipsky said he and his family learned about it from a reporter. The agency refused to answer questions about the decision, instead issuing a statement by email that said resolving the Range Resources matter allowed the EPA to shift its "focus in this case away from litigation and toward a joint effort on the science and safety of energy extraction."

After the agency dropped its action, the company offered scientists access to a site in southwestern Pennsylvania. The EPA has not yet accepted the offer.

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Jackson said it was "premature" to withdraw the order and said the EPA "dropped the ball in dropping their investigation."

Lipsky, who is still tied up in a legal battle with Range Resources, now pays about $1,000 a month to haul water to his home. He, his wife and three children become unnerved when their methane detectors go off. Sometime soon, he said, the family will have to decide whether to stay in the large stone house or move.

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The company insists the gas in Lipsky's water is from natural migration and not drilling. Range Resources' testing indicates that its gas well was working properly and that the gas came from a different rock formation called Strawn shale and not the deeper Barnett shale, Poole said.

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EPA changed course after gas company gripe
Worcester Telegram & Gazette - Online

01/17/2013

By Ramit Plushnick-Masti THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

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Obama's EPA Shuts Down Damning Fracking Study
CounterPunch - Online

01/17/2013

The Associated Press has a breaking investigative story out today revealing that the Obama Administration's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) censored a smoking gun scientific report in March 2012 that it had contracted out to a scientist who conducted field data on 32 water samples in Weatherford, TX.

That report, according to the AP, would have explicitly linked methane migration to hydraulic fracturing ("fracking") in Weatherford, a city with 25,000+ citizens located in the heart of the Barnett Shale geologic formation 30 minutes from Dallas.

It was authored by Geoffrey Thyne, a geologist formerly on the faculty of the Colorado School of Mines and University of Wyoming before departing from the latter for a job in the private sector working for Interralogic Inc. in Ft Collins, CO.

This isn't the first time Thyne's scientific research has been shoved aside, either. Thyne wrote two landmark studies on groundwater contamination in Garfield County, CO, the first showing that it existed, the second confirming that the contamination was directly linked to fracking in the area.

It's the second study that got him in trouble.

"Thyne says he was told to cease his research by higher-ups. He didn't," The Checks and Balances Project explained. " And when it came to renew his contract, Thyne was cut loose."

From Smoking Gun to Censorship: Range Resources Link

The Obama EPA's Weatherford, TX study was long-in-the-making, with its orgins actually dating back to a case of water contamination in 2010. The victim: Steve Lipsky.

"At first, the Environmental Protection Agency believed the situation was so serious that it issued a rare emergency order in late 2010 that said at least two homeowners were in immediate danger from a well saturated with flammable methane," the AP wrote.

AP proceeded to explain that Lipsky had "reported his family's drinking water had begun 'bubbling' like champagne" and that his "well...contains so much methane that the...water [is] pouring out of a garden hose [that] can be ignited."

The driller in this case was a corporation notorious for intimidating local communities and governmental officials at all levels of governance: Range Resources. Range, in this case, set up shop for shale gas production in a "wooded area about a mile from Lipsky's home," according to the AP.

As DeSmogBlog revealed in November 2011, Range Resources utilizes psychological warfare techniques as part of its overarching public relations strategy.

Due to the grave health concerns associated with the presence of methane and benzene in drinking water, the Obama EPA "ordered Range...to take steps to clean their water wells and provide affected homeowners with safe water," wrote the AP.

Range's response? It "threatened not to cooperate" with the Obama EPA's study on fracking's link to water

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contamination. The non-cooperation lead to the Obama EPA suing Range Resources.

It was during this phase of the struggle where things got interesting. As the AP explained,

Believing the case was headed for a lengthy legal battle, the Obama EPA asked an independent scientist named Geoffrey Thyne to analyze water samples taken from 32 water wells. In the report obtained by the AP, Thyne concluded from chemical testing that the gas in the drinking water could have originated from Range Resources' nearby drilling operation.

Despite this smoking gun, everything was soon shut down, with the Obama EPA reversing its emergency order, terminating the court battle and censoring Thyne's report. The AP explained that the Obama EPA has "refused to answer questions about the decision."

"I just can't believe that an agency that knows the truth about something like that, or has evidence like this, wouldn't use it," Lipsky, who now pays $1,000 a month to have water hauled to his family's house, told the AP.

"Duke Study" Co-Author Confirms Veracity of Thyne's Study

Robert Jackson, a Professor of Global Environmental Change at Duke University and co-author of the "Duke Study" linking fracking to groundwater contamination did an independent peer review of Thyne's censored findings. He found that it is probable that the methane in Lipsky's well water likely ended up there thanks to the fracking process.

Range predictably dismissed Thyne and Jackson as "anti-industry."

Americans Against Fracking: An "Unconscionable" Decision

Americans Against Fracking summed up the situation best in a scathing press release:

It is unconscionable that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which is tasked with safeguarding our nation's vital natural resources, would fold under pressure to the oil and gas industry...It is again abundantly clear that the deep pocketed oil and gas industry will stop at nothing to protect its own interests, even when mounting scientific evidence shows that drilling and fracking pose a direct threat to vital drinking water supplies.

There's also a tragic human side to this tale.

"This has been total hell," Lipsky told the AP. "It's been taking a huge toll on my family and on our life."

Steve Horn is a Madison, WI-based freelance investigative journalist and Research Fellow at DeSmogBlog.

EPA & Hydraulic Fracturing - Jan. 17

EPA changed course after gas company protested
KHOU-TV - Online

01/17/2013

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WSLS-TV - Online

01/17/2013

By: RAMIT PLUSHNICK-MASTI | Associated Press

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EPA changed course after gas company protested
Advocate - Online, The

01/17/2013

In this Nov. 27, 2012 photo, a well vent burns as water flows from Steve Lipsky's well outside his family's home in rural Parker County near Weatherford, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence a gas company's drilling operation contaminated Lipsky's drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving the family with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or ìfracking,î operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions. Photo: LM Otero

In this Nov. 26, 2012 photo, Steve Lipsky pauses during an interview at his family's home in rural Parker County near Weatherford, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence a gas company's drilling operation contaminated Lipsky's drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving the family with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions. Photo: LM Otero

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This Dec. 6, 2012 aerial photo shows a natural gas well, top, in rural Parker County near Granbury, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence the gas company's drilling operation contaminated nearby drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving households with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions. Photo: LM Otero

In this Nov. 27, 2012 photo, water flowing from Steve Lipsky's well ignites when he puts a flame to the well spigot outside his family's home in rural Parker County near Weatherford, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence a gas company's drilling operation contaminated Lipsky's drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving the family with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions. Photo: LM Otero

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At first, the Environmental Protection Agency believed the situation was so serious that it issued a rare emergency order in late 2010 that said at least two homeowners were in immediate danger from a well saturated with flammable methane. More than a year later, the agency rescinded its mandate and refused to explain why.

Now a confidential report obtained by The Associated Press and interviews with company representatives show that the EPA had scientific evidence against the driller, Range Resources, but changed course after the company threatened not to cooperate with a national study into a common form of drilling called hydraulic fracturing. Regulators set aside an analysis that concluded the drilling could have been to blame for the contamination.

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The case isn't the first in which the EPA initially linked a hydraulic fracturing operation to water contamination and then softened its position after the industry protested.

A similar dispute unfolded in west-central Wyoming in late 2011, when the EPA released an initial report that showed hydraulic fracturing could have contaminated groundwater. After industry and GOP leaders went on the attack, the agency said it had decided to do more testing. It has yet to announce a final conclusion.

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Believing the case was headed for a lengthy legal battle, the EPA asked an independent scientist named Geoffrey Thyne to analyze water samples taken from 32 water wells. In the report obtained by the AP, Thyne concluded from chemical testing that the gas in the drinking water could have originated from Range Resources' nearby drilling operation.

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"They said that they would look into it, which I believe is exactly what they did," Poole said. "I'm proud of them. As an American, I think that's exactly what they should have done."

The EPA offered no public explanation for its change in thinking, and Lipsky said he and his family learned about it from a reporter. The agency refused to answer questions about the decision, instead issuing a statement by email that said resolving the Range Resources matter allowed the EPA to shift its "focus in this case away from litigation and toward a joint effort on the science and safety of energy extraction."

After the agency dropped its action, the company offered scientists access to a site in southwestern Pennsylvania. But the EPA has not yet accepted the offer.

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The confidential report relied on a type of testing known as isotopic analysis, which produces a unique chemical fingerprint that sometimes allows researchers to trace the origin of gas or oil.

Jackson, who studies hydraulic fracturing and specializes in isotopic analysis, acknowledged that more data is needed to determine for certain where the gas came from. But even if the gas came from elsewhere, Range Resources' drilling could have contributed to the problem in Lipsky's water because gas migrates, he added.

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In addition, he said, isotopic analysis cannot be used in this case because the chemical makeup of the gases in the two formations is indistinguishable. A Range Resources spokesman also dismissed Thyne and Jackson as anti-industry.

Range Resources has not shared its data with the EPA or the Railroad Commission. Poole said the data is proprietary and could only be seen by Houston-based Weatherford Laboratories, where it originated. It was analyzed for Range Resources by a Weatherford scientist, Mark McCaffrey, who did not respond to requests for an interview.

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CU-Boulder, NOAA study uncovers oil and gas emission's 'chemical signature'
Colorado Daily - Online

01/17/2013

Study finds that more than half of ozone-forming pollutants in Erie come from drilling activity

Emissions from oil and natural gas operations account for more than half of the pollutants -- such as propane and butane -- that contribute to ozone formation in Erie, according to a new scientific study published this week.

The study, the work of scientists at the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences at the University of Colorado, concluded that oil and gas activity contributed about 55 percent of the volatile organic compounds linked to unhealthy ground-level ozone in Erie.

Key to the findings was the recent discovery of a "chemical signature" that differentiates emissions from oil and gas activity from those given off by automobiles, cow manure or other sources of volatile organic compounds.

"There were very, very few data points that did not fall on the natural gas line," Jessica Gilman, research scientist at CIRES and lead author of the study, said Wednesday. "We had a very strong signature from the raw natural gas."

CIRES is a joint institute of CU and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Its study was published online Monday in the journal Environmental Science and Technology.

Emissions detected in Boulder

The air quality monitoring effort, dubbed the Boulder Atmospheric Observatory, was conducted in February and March of 2011 on a tower set up a couple of miles east of downtown Erie.

It showed that, on average, Erie had highly elevated levels of propane in its air -- 10 times the levels found in famously smoggy Pasadena, Calif., and four times those in Houston. The results prompted town leaders last year to place a six-month moratorium on new drilling applications while they gathered additional information on the fast-growing industry.

But trying to determine exactly how much of Erie's propane was due to the thousands of gas wells located in and around town, and how much was due to the effects of being part of a major metropolitan area, was inexact at best.

Until now.

"What we saw at the Boulder Atmospheric Observatory was the mixing of two sources -- oil and gas and vehicles," Joost de Gouw, research physicist at CIRES, said. "For each compound, we can separate how much came from oil and gas and how much came from vehicles."

The researchers arrived at the unique chemical signature by analyzing the chemical makeup of all their air samples, characterizing 53 different types of volatile organic compounds and comparing the results to the composition of raw natural gas.

"We estimate 55 percent of the compounds contributing to ozone formation in Erie are from oil and gas," de Gouw said.

And it's not just Erie that is affected by oil and gas activity, which has exploded in recent years in the gigantic Wattenberg Gas Field northeast of Denver. The study showed that scientists found the telltale signs of drilling emissions in air

samples taken in Fort Collins and Boulder, albeit in lesser amounts.

"Air pollution can travel many, many miles downwind from the source," Gilman said. "Air doesn't stop at any border."

Health effects in dispute

But whether emissions from oil and gas activity are endangering human health on a wide scale continues to be fiercely debated. Multiple families in Erie and around the state have complained that living so close to wells has made them sick, with nosebleeds, asthma and headaches as common symptoms.

But two studies commissioned by the town last year concluded that the levels of propane in Erie weren't concerning.

One environmental consulting firm concluded that even a lifetime exposure to the concentrations cited in the CIRES study would have a "low" risk of causing adverse health effects. A second firm stated that the town's propane levels were "1,000-fold or more below those considered to be of health concern."

Doug Flanders, spokesman for the Colorado Oil and Gas Association, wrote in an email Wednesday that Denver's air quality is "much better" than that of Houston or Los Angeles.

"December 2012 EPA data show Denver-area smog levels are well below those of Houston or Los Angeles," he wrote.

Gordon Pierce, technical services program manager for the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's air pollution control division, said the state put in place stricter ozone controls in 2006 and 2008 for the oil and gas industry.

New control requirements were established for condensate tanks and new reporting and record-keeping requirements were also implemented. Late last year, Pierce said, the state adopted new EPA rules regarding emissions at gas wells. But he said his agency will continue to monitor the effects of the industry in Colorado, which now has more than 50,000 active wells.

There may not be proven health effects from individual volatile organic compounds, Pierce said, but when those compounds are combined with nitrogen oxides from vehicle tailpipes and baked in the sun, they form ozone. At ground level, ozone can cause breathing difficulties and eye irritations, especially among the young and elderly.

He said it's possible that if a strong enough link is established between oil and gas operations and high levels of ozone, the state could pursue stronger regulatory measures.

"We're always looking at different strategies for reducing ozone," Pierce said.

Pointing to Weld County

In the meantime, anti-drilling activists such as Jen Palazzolo plan to use the CIRES study's findings to once again put pressure on Erie's elected leaders to be tougher on oil and gas operators in town. Palazzolo is a leader of Erie Rising, a group that has strongly resisted oil and gas drilling in Erie.

"The study supports information that we've been trying to put out and that the industry has been trying to shoot down," she said. "There's no way you can argue against the fact that oil and gas contributes to ozone precursors."

After its drilling moratorium expired in September, Erie entered into memoranda of understanding with two operators that require them to use steel-rim berms around tanks and separators, closed-loop systems for drilling and completion operations, and a more effective vapor recovery unit for new wells. The companies also agreed not to use hydraulic

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fracturing fluid products that contain diesel, 2-Butoxyethanol or benzene.

But Palazzolo and others opposed to the industry say those agreements don't do nearly enough to protect the public health.

"It's time for us to re-address this with the Erie Board of Trustees and ask them if they are going to continue approving the number of oil and gas operations that are planned in town," she said.

Erie Trustee Mark Gruber said the town has done just about all it can on the issue, given the reality that control over the industry rests with the state and not local communities. Furthermore, he wonders how effective additional restrictions would be given the fact that the science indicates that volatile organic compounds are windborne and travel long distances.

"By and large, the contamination we see -- if it's in Erie, I'm going to point to Weld County," he said. "We're between a rock and a hard place. We've got 300 wells, they've got 19,000. We can't build a wall to stop the emissions coming from Weld County."

The county had 19,799 active wells as of last week, and in 2012 saw 1,826 well permits approved, representing 48 percent of all permits approved statewide that year.

Weld County Commissioner Sean Conway said his county works closely with state health authorities on ensuring the cleanest footprint from oil and gas operations. Ninety-five to 98 percent of emissions are being captured by the industry now, he said, and ozone levels have actually decreased in his county over the last few years.

Still, he said he welcomes the news this week that emissions from the oil and gas industry can be specifically traced by their chemical makeup. He said it could serve as a powerful tool for dealing with the industry from a factual standpoint, rather than an emotional one.

"If they are able to identify this now, it will give us a good starting point in identifying what are the actual impacts of this and how we go about ensuring public health and safety," Conway said.

Contact Camera Staff Writer John Aguilar at 303-473-1389 or aguilarj@dailycamera.com.

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EPA changed course after gas company protested
Deseret News - Online

01/17/2013

Texas family's water is contaminated with natural gas detritus

Associated Press

WEATHERFORD, Texas — When a man in a Fort Worth suburb reported his family's drinking water had begun bubbling like champagne, the federal government sounded an alarm: A company may have tainted their wells while drilling for natural gas.

At first, the Environmental Protection Agency believed the situation was so serious that it issued a rare emergency order in late 2010 that said at least two homeowners were in immediate danger from a well saturated with flammable methane. More than a year later, the agency rescinded its mandate and refused to explain why.

Now a confidential report obtained by The Associated Press and interviews with company representatives show that the EPA had scientific evidence against the driller, Range Resources, but changed course after the company threatened not to cooperate with a national study into a common form of drilling called hydraulic fracturing. Regulators set aside an analysis that concluded the drilling could have been to blame for the contamination.

For Steve Lipsky, the EPA decision seemed to ignore the dangers to his family. His water supply contains so much methane that the gas in water flowing from a pipe connected to the well can be ignited.

"I just can't believe that an agency that knows the truth about something like that, or has evidence like this, wouldn't use it," said Lipsky, who fears he will have to abandon his dream home in an upscale neighborhood of Weatherford.

The case isn't the first in which the EPA initially linked a hydraulic fracturing operation to water contamination and then softened its position after the industry protested.

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Montana Standard - Online, The

01/17/2013

2013-01-16T20:25:15Z 2013-01-16T22:14:57Z EPA changed course after gas company protested

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5 hours ago • Associated Press

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EPA & Hydraulic Fracturing - Jan. 17

EPA changed course after gas company protested
Western Star - Online

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In this Nov. 26, 2012 photo, Steve Lipsky demonstrates how his well water ignites when he puts a flame to the flowing well spigot outside his family's home in rural Parker County near Weatherford, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence a gas company's drilling operation contaminated Lipsky's drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving the family with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions. (AP Photo/LM Otero)

In this Nov. 27, 2012 photo, a well vent burns as water flows from Steve Lipsky's well outside his family's home in rural Parker County near Weatherford, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence a gas company's drilling operation contaminated Lipsky's drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving the family with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or ìfracking,î operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions. (AP Photo/LM Otero)

In this Nov. 26, 2012 photo, Steve Lipsky pauses during an interview at his family's home in rural Parker County near Weatherford, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence a gas company's drilling operation contaminated Lipsky's drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving the family with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions. (AP Photo/LM Otero)

In this Nov. 26, 2012 photo, Steve Lipsky pauses during an interview at his family's home in rural Parker County near Weatherford, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence a gas company's drilling operation contaminated Lipsky's drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving the family with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or ìfracking,î operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions. (AP Photo/LM Otero)

This Dec. 6, 2012 aerial photo shows a natural gas well, top, in rural Parker County near Granbury, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence the gas company's drilling operation contaminated nearby drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving households with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions.

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(AP Photo/LM Otero)

In a Nov. 26, 2012 photo, a road leads to a natural gas well near Weatherford, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence the gas company's drilling operation contaminated nearby families' drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving the families with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions. (AP Photo/LM Otero)

In this Nov. 27, 2012 photo, water flowing from Steve Lipsky's well ignites when he puts a flame to the well spigot outside his family's home in rural Parker County near Weatherford, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence a gas company's drilling operation contaminated Lipsky's drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving the family with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions. (AP Photo/LM Otero)

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At first, the Environmental Protection Agency believed the situation was so serious that it issued a rare emergency order in late 2010 that said at least two homeowners were in immediate danger from a well saturated with flammable methane. More than a year later, the agency rescinded its mandate and refused to explain why.

Now a confidential report obtained by The Associated Press and interviews with company representatives show that the EPA had scientific evidence against the driller, Range Resources, but changed course after the company threatened not to cooperate with a national study into a common form of drilling called hydraulic fracturing. Regulators set aside an analysis that concluded the drilling could have been to blame for the contamination.

For Steve Lipsky, the EPA decision seemed to ignore the dangers to his family. His water supply contains so much methane that the gas in water flowing from a pipe connected to the well can be ignited.

"I just can't believe that an agency that knows the truth about something like that, or has evidence like this, wouldn't use it," said Lipsky, who fears he will have to abandon his dream home in an upscale neighborhood of Weatherford.

The case isn't the first in which the EPA initially linked a hydraulic fracturing operation to water contamination and then softened its position after the industry protested.

A similar dispute unfolded in west-central Wyoming in late 2011, when the EPA released an initial report that showed hydraulic fracturing could have contaminated groundwater. After industry and GOP leaders went on the attack, the agency said it had decided to do more testing. It has yet to announce a final conclusion.

Hydraulic fracturing — often called "fracking" — allows drillers to tap into oil and gas reserves that were once considered out of reach because they were locked in deep layers of rock.

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State agencies usually regulate water and air pollution, so the EPA's involvement in the Texas matter was unusual from the start. The EPA began investigating complaints about the methane in December 2010, because it said the Texas Railroad Commission, which oversees oil and gas drilling, had not responded quickly enough to the reports of bubbling water.

Government scientists believed two families, including the Lipskys, were in danger from methane and cancer-causing benzene and ordered Range Resources to take steps to clean their water wells and provide affected homeowners with safe water. The company stopped doing that after state regulators declared in March 2011 that Range Resources was not responsible. The dispute between the EPA and the company then moved into federal court.

Believing the case was headed for a lengthy legal battle, the EPA asked an independent scientist named Geoffrey Thyne to analyze water samples taken from 32 water wells. In the report obtained by the AP, Thyne concluded from chemical testing that the gas in the drinking water could have originated from Range Resources' nearby drilling operation.

Meanwhile, the EPA was seeking industry leaders to participate in a national study into hydraulic fracturing. Range Resources told EPA officials in Washington that so long as the agency continued to pursue a "scientifically baseless" action against the company in Weatherford, it would not take part in the study and would not allow government scientists onto its drilling sites, said company attorney David Poole.

In March 2012, the EPA retracted its emergency order, halted the court battle and set aside Thyne's report showing that the gas in Lipsky's water was nearly identical to the gases the Plano, Texas-based company was producing.

"They said that they would look into it, which I believe is exactly what they did," Poole said. "I'm proud of them. As an American, I think that's exactly what they should have done."

The EPA offered no public explanation for its change in thinking, and Lipsky said he and his family learned about it from a reporter. The agency refused to answer questions about the decision, instead issuing a statement by email that said resolving the Range Resources matter allowed the EPA to shift its "focus in this case away from litigation and toward a joint effort on the science and safety of energy extraction."

After the agency dropped its action, the company offered scientists access to a site in southwestern Pennsylvania. But the EPA has not yet accepted the offer.

Rob Jackson, chairman of global environmental change at Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment, reviewed Thyne's report and the raw data upon which it was based. He agreed the gas in Lipsky's well could have originated in a rock formation known as the Barnett shale, the same area where Range Resources was extracting gas.

Jackson said it was "premature" to withdraw the order and said the EPA "dropped the ball in dropping their investigation." Two of the wells included in Thyne's report had water containing more than the 10 milligrams per liter of methane, or enough to be deemed hazardous by the EPA. One had 35 milligrams per liter, which Jackson called "particularly high" and an amount that federal regulators say is more than what requires immediate action.

"Two of the homes had methane within the action level for hazard mitigation, one of them well above this hazard threshold," Jackson said.

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Lipsky, who is still tied up in a legal battle with Range Resources, now pays about $1,000 a month to haul water to his home. He, his wife and three children become unnerved when their methane detectors go off. Sometime soon, he said, the family will have to decide whether to stay in the large stone house or move.

"This has been total hell," Lipsky said. "It's been taking a huge toll on my family and on our life."

The confidential report relied on a type of testing known as isotopic analysis, which produces a unique chemical fingerprint that sometimes allows researchers to trace the origin of gas or oil.

Jackson, who studies hydraulic fracturing and specializes in isotopic analysis, acknowledged that more data is needed to determine for certain where the gas came from. But even if the gas came from elsewhere, Range Resources' drilling could have contributed to the problem in Lipsky's water because gas migrates, he added.

The company insists the gas in Lipsky's water is from natural migration and not drilling. Range Resources' testing indicates the gas came from a different rock formation called Strawn shale and not the deeper Barnett shale, Poole said.

In addition, he said, isotopic analysis cannot be used in this case because the chemical makeup of the gases in the two formations is indistinguishable. A Range Resources spokesman also dismissed Thyne and Jackson as anti-industry.

Range Resources has not shared its data with the EPA or the Railroad Commission. Poole said the data is proprietary and could only be seen by Houston-based Weatherford Laboratories, where it originated. It was analyzed for Range Resources by a Weatherford scientist, Mark McCaffrey, who did not respond to requests for an interview.

Gas has always been in the water in that area, Poole said. And years before Range Resources began drilling, at least one water well in the neighborhood contained so much methane, it went up in flames.

At another home with dangerously high methane levels in the water, the company insisted the gas had been there since the well was first dug many years ago. The homeowner was not aware of anything wrong until Range Resources began drilling in 2009.

Jackson said it was "unrealistic" to suggest that people could have tainted water and not notice.

"It bubbles like champagne or mineral waters," he said. "The notion that people would have wells and have this in their water and not see this is wrong."

Associated Press writers Nomaan Merchant in Dallas, Allen Breed in Raleigh, N.C., and Michael Rubinkam in Allentown, Pa., contributed to this report.

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by

RAMIT PLUSHNICK-MASTI, Associated Press

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For Steve Lipsky, the EPA decision seemed to ignore the dangers of his well, which he says contains so much methane that gas coming from the water in a garden hose attached to the well head can be ignited.

"I just can't believe that an agency that knows the truth about something like that, or has evidence like this, wouldn't use it," said Lipsky, who fears he will have to abandon his dream home in an upscale neighborhood of Weatherford.

The case isn't the first in which the EPA initially linked a hydraulic fracturing operation to water contamination and then softened its position after the industry protested.

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CU-Boulder, NOAA study uncovers oil and gas emission's 'chemical signature'
Longmont Times-Call - Online

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Study finds that more than half of ozone-forming pollutants in Erie come from drilling activity

Oil and gas wells shown near Erie Community Park in March 2012. (Matthew Jonas)

Emissions from oil and natural gas operations account for more than half of the pollutants -- such as propane and butane -- that contribute to ozone formation in Erie, according to a new scientific study published this week.

The study, the work of scientists at the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences at the University of Colorado, concluded that oil and gas activity contributed about 55 percent of the volatile organic compounds linked to unhealthy ground-level ozone in Erie.

Key to the findings was the recent discovery of a "chemical signature" that differentiates emissions from oil and gas activity from those given off by automobiles, cow manure or other sources of volatile organic compounds.

"There were very, very few data points that did not fall on the natural gas line," Jessica Gilman, research scientist at CIRES and lead author of the study, said Wednesday. "We had a very strong signature from the raw natural gas."

CIRES is a joint institute of CU and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Its study was published online Monday in the journal Environmental Science and Technology.

Emissions detected in Boulder

The air quality monitoring effort, dubbed the Boulder Atmospheric Observatory, was conducted in February and March of 2011 on a tower set up a couple of miles east of downtown Erie.

It showed that, on average, Erie had highly elevated levels of propane in its air -- 10 times the levels found in famously smoggy Pasadena, Calif., and four times those in Houston. The results prompted town leaders last year to place a six-month moratorium on new drilling applications while they gathered additional information on the fast-growing industry.

But trying to determine exactly how much of Erie's propane was due to the thousands of gas wells located in and around town, and how much was due to the effects of being part of a major metropolitan area, was inexact at best.

Until now.

"What we saw at the Boulder Atmospheric Observatory was the mixing of two sources -- oil and gas and vehicles," Joost de Gouw, research physicist at CIRES, said. "For each compound, we can separate how much came from oil and gas and how much came from vehicles."

The researchers arrived at the unique chemical signature by analyzing the chemical makeup of all their air samples, characterizing 53 different types of volatile organic compounds and comparing the results to the composition of raw natural gas.

"We estimate 55 percent of the compounds contributing to ozone formation in Erie are from oil and gas," de Gouw said.

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And it's not just Erie that is affected by oil and gas activity, which has exploded in recent years in the gigantic Wattenberg Gas Field northeast of Denver. The study showed that scientists found the telltale signs of drilling emissions in air samples taken in Fort Collins and Boulder, albeit in lesser amounts.

"Air pollution can travel many, many miles downwind from the source," Gilman said. "Air doesn't stop at any border."

Health effects in dispute

But whether emissions from oil and gas activity are endangering human health on a wide scale continues to be fiercely debated. Multiple families in Erie and around the state have complained that living so close to wells has made them sick, with nosebleeds, asthma and headaches as common symptoms.

But two studies commissioned by the town last year concluded that the levels of propane in Erie weren't concerning.

One environmental consulting firm concluded that even a lifetime exposure to the concentrations cited in the CIRES study would have a "low" risk of causing adverse health effects. A second firm stated that the town's propane levels were "1,000-fold or more below those considered to be of health concern."

Doug Flanders, spokesman for the Colorado Oil and Gas Association, wrote in an email Wednesday that Denver's air quality is "much better" than that of Houston or Los Angeles.

"December 2012 EPA data show Denver-area smog levels are well below those of Houston or Los Angeles," he wrote.

Gordon Pierce, technical services program manager for the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's air pollution control division, said the state put in place stricter ozone controls in 2006 and 2008 for the oil and gas industry.

New control requirements were established for condensate tanks and new reporting and record-keeping requirements were also implemented. Late last year, Pierce said, the state adopted new EPA rules regarding emissions at gas wells. But he said his agency will continue to monitor the effects of the industry in Colorado, which now has more than 50,000 active wells.

There may not be proven health effects from individual volatile organic compounds, Pierce said, but when those compounds are combined with nitrogen oxides from vehicle tailpipes and baked in the sun, they form ozone. At ground level, ozone can cause breathing difficulties and eye irritations, especially among the young and elderly.

He said it's possible that if a strong enough link is established between oil and gas operations and high levels of ozone, the state could pursue stronger regulatory measures.

"We're always looking at different strategies for reducing ozone," Pierce said.

Pointing to Weld County

In the meantime, anti-drilling activists such as Jen Palazzolo plan to use the CIRES study's findings to once again put pressure on Erie's elected leaders to be tougher on oil and gas operators in town. Palazzolo is a leader of Erie Rising, a group that has strongly resisted oil and gas drilling in Erie.

"The study supports information that we've been trying to put out and that the industry has been trying to shoot down," she said. "There's no way you can argue against the fact that oil and gas contributes to ozone precursors."

After its drilling moratorium expired in September, Erie entered into memoranda of understanding with two operators that

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require them to use steel-rim berms around tanks and separators, closed-loop systems for drilling and completion operations, and a more effective vapor recovery unit for new wells. The companies also agreed not to use hydraulic fracturing fluid products that contain diesel, 2-Butoxyethanol or benzene.

But Palazzolo and others opposed to the industry say those agreements don't do nearly enough to protect the public health.

"It's time for us to re-address this with the Erie Board of Trustees and ask them if they are going to continue approving the number of oil and gas operations that are planned in town," she said.

Erie Trustee Mark Gruber said the town has done just about all it can on the issue, given the reality that control over the industry rests with the state and not local communities. Furthermore, he wonders how effective additional restrictions would be given the fact that the science indicates that volatile organic compounds are windborne and travel long distances.

"By and large, the contamination we see -- if it's in Erie, I'm going to point to Weld County," he said. "We're between a rock and a hard place. We've got 300 wells, they've got 19,000. We can't build a wall to stop the emissions coming from Weld County."

The county had 19,799 active wells as of last week, and in 2012 saw 1,826 well permits approved, representing 48 percent of all permits approved statewide that year.

Weld County Commissioner Sean Conway said his county works closely with state health authorities on ensuring the cleanest footprint from oil and gas operations. Ninety-five to 98 percent of emissions are being captured by the industry now, he said, and ozone levels have actually decreased in his county over the last few years.

Still, he said he welcomes the news this week that emissions from the oil and gas industry can be specifically traced by their chemical makeup. He said it could serve as a powerful tool for dealing with the industry from a factual standpoint, rather than an emotional one.

"If they are able to identify this now, it will give us a good starting point in identifying what are the actual impacts of this and how we go about ensuring public health and safety," Conway said.

Contact Camera Staff Writer John Aguilar at 303-473-1389 or aguilarj@dailycamera.com.

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Tags: hydraulic fracturing, water contamination, oil, news, texas, epa

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CU-Boulder, NOAA study uncovers oil and gas emission's 'chemical signature' Colorado Daily - Online

01/17/2013

CU-Boulder, NOAA study uncovers oil and gas emission's 'chemical signature'

Study finds that more than half of ozone-forming pollutants in Erie come from drilling activity

By John Aguilar Camera Staff Writer

dailycamera.com

Posted:

01/16/2013 09:00:52 PM MST

Oil and gas wells shown near Erie Community Park in March 2012.

(

Matthew Jonas

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Emissions from oil and natural gas operations account for more than half of the pollutants -- such as propane and butane -- that contribute to ozone formation in Erie, according to a new scientific study published this week.

The study, the work of scientists at the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences at the University of Colorado, concluded that oil and gas activity contributed about 55 percent of the volatile organic compounds linked to unhealthy ground-level ozone in Erie.

Key to the findings was the recent discovery of a "chemical signature" that differentiates emissions from oil and gas activity from those given off by automobiles, cow manure or other sources of volatile organic compounds.

"There were very, very few data points that did not fall on the natural gas line," Jessica Gilman, research scientist at CIRES and lead author of the study, said Wednesday. "We had a very strong signature from the raw natural gas."

CIRES is a joint institute of CU and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Its study was published online Monday in the journal Environmental Science and Technology.

Emissions detected in Boulder

The air quality monitoring effort, dubbed the Boulder Atmospheric Observatory, was conducted in February and March of 2011 on a tower set up a couple of miles east of downtown Erie.

It showed that, on average, Erie had highly elevated levels of propane in its air -- 10 times the levels found in famously

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smoggy Pasadena, Calif., and four times those in Houston. The results prompted town leaders last year to place a six-month moratorium on new drilling applications while they gathered additional information on the fast-growing industry.

But trying to determine exactly how much of Erie's propane was due to the thousands of gas wells located in and around town, and how much was due to the effects of being part of a major metropolitan area, was inexact at best.

Until now.

"What we saw at the Boulder Atmospheric Observatory was the mixing of two sources -- oil and gas and vehicles," Joost de Gouw, research physicist at CIRES, said. "For each compound, we can separate how much came from oil and gas and how much came from vehicles."

The researchers arrived at the unique chemical signature by analyzing the chemical makeup of all their air samples, characterizing 53 different types of volatile organic compounds and comparing the results to the composition of raw natural gas.

"We estimate 55 percent of the compounds contributing to ozone formation in Erie are from oil and gas," de Gouw said.

And it's not just Erie that is affected by oil and gas activity, which has exploded in recent years in the gigantic Wattenberg Gas Field northeast of Denver. The study showed that scientists found the telltale signs of drilling emissions in air samples taken in Fort Collins and Boulder, albeit in lesser amounts.

"Air pollution can travel many, many miles downwind from the source," Gilman said. "Air doesn't stop at any border."

Health effects in dispute

But whether emissions from oil and gas activity are endangering human health on a wide scale continues to be fiercely debated. Multiple families in Erie and around the state have complained that living so close to wells has made them sick, with nosebleeds, asthma and headaches as common symptoms.

But two studies commissioned by the town last year concluded that the levels of propane in Erie weren't concerning.

One environmental consulting firm concluded that even a lifetime exposure to the concentrations cited in the CIRES study would have a "low" risk of causing adverse health effects. A second firm stated that the town's propane levels were "1,000-fold or more below those considered to be of health concern."

Doug Flanders, spokesman for the Colorado Oil and Gas Association, wrote in an email Wednesday that Denver's air quality is "much better" than that of Houston or Los Angeles.

"December 2012 EPA data show Denver-area smog levels are well below those of Houston or Los Angeles," he wrote.

Gordon Pierce, technical services program manager for the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's air pollution control division, said the state put in place stricter ozone controls in 2006 and 2008 for the oil and gas industry.

New control requirements were established for condensate tanks and new reporting and record-keeping requirements were also implemented. Late last year, Pierce said, the state adopted new EPA rules regarding emissions at gas wells. But he said his agency will continue to monitor the effects of the industry in Colorado, which now has more than 50,000 active wells.

There may not be proven health effects from individual volatile organic compounds, Pierce said, but when those

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compounds are combined with nitrogen oxides from vehicle tailpipes and baked in the sun, they form ozone. At ground level, ozone can cause breathing difficulties and eye irritations, especially among the young and elderly.

He said it's possible that if a strong enough link is established between oil and gas operations and high levels of ozone, the state could pursue stronger regulatory measures.

"We're always looking at different strategies for reducing ozone," Pierce said.

Pointing to Weld County

In the meantime, anti-drilling activists such as Jen Palazzolo plan to use the CIRES study's findings to once again put pressure on Erie's elected leaders to be tougher on oil and gas operators in town. Palazzolo is a leader of Erie Rising, a group that has strongly resisted oil and gas drilling in Erie.

"The study supports information that we've been trying to put out and that the industry has been trying to shoot down," she said. "There's no way you can argue against the fact that oil and gas contributes to ozone precursors."

After its drilling moratorium expired in September, Erie entered into memoranda of understanding with two operators that require them to use steel-rim berms around tanks and separators, closed-loop systems for drilling and completion operations, and a more effective vapor recovery unit for new wells. The companies also agreed not to use hydraulic fracturing fluid products that contain diesel, 2-Butoxyethanol or benzene.

But Palazzolo and others opposed to the industry say those agreements don't do nearly enough to protect the public health.

"It's time for us to re-address this with the Erie Board of Trustees and ask them if they are going to continue approving the number of oil and gas operations that are planned in town," she said.

Erie Trustee Mark Gruber said the town has done just about all it can on the issue, given the reality that control over the industry rests with the state and not local communities. Furthermore, he wonders how effective additional restrictions would be given the fact that the science indicates that volatile organic compounds are windborne and travel long distances.

"By and large, the contamination we see -- if it's in Erie, I'm going to point to Weld County," he said. "We're between a rock and a hard place. We've got 300 wells, they've got 19,000. We can't build a wall to stop the emissions coming from Weld County."

The county had 19,799 active wells as of last week, and in 2012 saw 1,826 well permits approved, representing 48 percent of all permits approved statewide that year.

Weld County Commissioner Sean Conway said his county works closely with state health authorities on ensuring the cleanest footprint from oil and gas operations. Ninety-five to 98 percent of emissions are being captured by the industry now, he said, and ozone levels have actually decreased in his county over the last few years.

Still, he said he welcomes the news this week that emissions from the oil and gas industry can be specifically traced by their chemical makeup. He said it could serve as a powerful tool for dealing with the industry from a factual standpoint, rather than an emotional one.

"If they are able to identify this now, it will give us a good starting point in identifying what are the actual impacts of this and how we go about ensuring public health and safety," Conway said.

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Contact Camera Staff Writer John Aguilar at 303-473-1389 or aguilarj@dailycamera.com .

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Mead joins Encana, landowners in disappointment about latest EPA extension for Pavillion study
Daily Journal - Online

01/17/2013

CHEYENNE, Wyoming — Gov. Matt Mead says he's disappointed the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is taking more public comments on a report on pollution in a Wyoming gas field.

The comment period was supposed to end Tuesday and has been extended to Sept. 30. That could postpone formal expert review of the 2011 report by another eight months.

EPA findings in the Pavillion area marked the first time the federal agency linked hydraulic fracturing with a case of groundwater pollution. Fracking involves pumping water, sand and chemicals into oil and gas wells to fracture rock formations.

Mead joins Pavillion-area landowners and gas field owner Encana in saying the extension doesn't help resolve the problem. EPA officials say the extension will allow them to post more information and receive more comments on the study.

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EPA changed course after gas company protested
KRGV-TV - Online

01/17/2013

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Posted: Jan 16, 2013 5:11 PM

Updated: Jan 16, 2013 5:12 PM

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The EPA offered no public explanation for its change in thinking, and Lipsky said he and his family learned about it from a reporter. The agency refused to answer questions about the decision, instead issuing a statement by email that said resolving the Range Resources matter allowed the EPA to shift its "focus in this case away from litigation and toward a joint effort on the science and safety of energy extraction."

After the agency dropped its action, the company offered scientists access to a site in southwestern Pennsylvania. The EPA has not yet accepted the offer.

Rob Jackson, chairman of global environmental change at Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment, reviewed Thyne's report and the raw data upon which it was based. He agreed the gas in Lipsky's well could have originated in a rock formation known as the Barnett shale, the same area where Range Resources was extracting gas.

Jackson said it was "premature" to withdraw the order and said the EPA "dropped the ball in dropping their investigation."

Lipsky, who is still tied up in a legal battle with Range Resources, now pays about $1,000 a month to haul water to his home. He, his wife and three children become unnerved when their methane detectors go off. Sometime soon, he said, the family will have to decide whether to stay in the large stone house or move.

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Plushnick-Masti can be followed on Twitter at https://twitter.com/RamitMastiAP

Topics: Gas Drilling-Water Contamination

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01/17/2013

EPA changed course after oil company protested

9:43 AM,

Jan 16, 2013

This Dec. 6, 2012 aerial photo shows a natural gas well, top, in rural Parker County near Granbury, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence the gas company's drilling operation contaminated nearby drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving households with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or ?fracking,? operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions. (AP Photo/LM Otero) / AP

Written by

RAMIT PLUSHNICK-MASTI, Associated Press

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Mead disappointed by new EPA Pavillion extension
WJAC-TV - Online

01/17/2013

Gov. Matt Mead has joined those expressing disappointment that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has extended for a third time a public comment period on a report on groundwater pollution in a Wyoming gas field rather than moving toward wrapping up the study.

The comment period was supposed to end Tuesday. Last week, the EPA announced it would be extended to Sept. 30. That could postpone independent experts' formal review of the December, 2011, report by another eight months or more.

"Wyoming did not ask for this delay nor do we want it. This does not move us toward resolving the concerns of the landowners in the area," Mead said in a statement released Wednesday.

The report on the EPA's findings in the Pavillion area marked the first time the federal agency blamed hydraulic fracturing for a specific case of groundwater pollution. Fracking involves pumping water, sand and chemicals into oil and gas wells to fracture open rock formations and increase the flow of oil and gas.

The report widened the gap between environmentalists who characterize fracking as a threat to clean groundwater and petroleum industry officials who insist fracking is safe. Both sides agree on one thing: The comment period extension is unnecessary.

Doug Hock, spokesman for Calgary-based Encana, which owns the gas field in the Pavillion area in west-central Wyoming, said by email: "There's no credible reason for further delay."

Those with polluted well water "continue to suffer the effects of living in a contaminated environment" while peer review is delayed, John Fenton, chairman of the group Pavillion Area Concerned Citizens, said in a release last week.

Contacted by email Wednesday, EPA Region 8 spokesman Rich Mylott would not respond to the governor's remarks. He also did not answer a question about the EPA's plans for peer review of the report.

He reiterated part of a prepared statement the EPA released to reporters who asked about the extension.

"The Agency will take into account new data, further stakeholder input, and public comment as it continues to review the status of the Pavillion investigation and considers options for moving forward," Mylott wrote, adding that he had no more information to provide.

The comment period began on Dec. 14, 2011, and was extended twice last year.

The first extension was last March, after the state and EPA agreed to collaborate on further groundwater testing. The second extension was in October, soon after those new test results — which were similar to the results of EPA's earlier testing — came out.

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EPA changed course after gas company protested
State Journal - Online, The

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January 17, 2013

EPA changed course after gas company protested

RAMIT PLUSHNICK-MASTI

Associated Press Published: January 17, 2013 12:50AM

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Jackson said it was "premature" to withdraw the order and said the EPA "dropped the ball in dropping their investigation." Two of the wells included in Thyne's report had water containing more than the 10 milligrams per liter of methane, or enough to be deemed hazardous by the EPA. One had 35 milligrams per liter, which Jackson called "particularly high" and an amount that federal regulators say is more than what requires immediate action.

"Two of the homes had methane within the action level for hazard mitigation, one of them well above this hazard

threshold," Jackson said.

Lipsky, who is still tied up in a legal battle with Range Resources, now pays about $1,000 a month to haul water to his home. He, his wife and three children become unnerved when their methane detectors go off. Sometime soon, he said, the family will have to decide whether to stay in the large stone house or move.

"This has been total hell," Lipsky said. "It's been taking a huge toll on my family and on our life."

The confidential report relied on a type of testing known as isotopic analysis, which produces a unique chemical fingerprint that sometimes allows researchers to trace the origin of gas or oil.

Jackson, who studies hydraulic fracturing and specializes in isotopic analysis, acknowledged that more data is needed to determine for certain where the gas came from. But even if the gas came from elsewhere, Range Resources' drilling could have contributed to the problem in Lipsky's water because gas migrates, he added.

The company insists the gas in Lipsky's water is from natural migration and not drilling. Range Resources' testing indicates the gas came from a different rock formation called Strawn shale and not the deeper Barnett shale, Poole said.

In addition, he said, isotopic analysis cannot be used in this case because the chemical makeup of the gases in the two formations is indistinguishable. A Range Resources spokesman also dismissed Thyne and Jackson as anti-industry.

Range Resources has not shared its data with the EPA or the Railroad Commission. Poole said the data is proprietary and could only be seen by Houston-based Weatherford Laboratories, where it originated. It was analyzed for Range Resources by a Weatherford scientist, Mark McCaffrey, who did not respond to requests for an interview.

Gas has always been in the water in that area, Poole said. And years before Range Resources began drilling, at least one water well in the neighborhood contained so much methane, it went up in flames.

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Associated Press writers Nomaan Merchant in Dallas, Allen Breed in Raleigh, N.C., and Michael Rubinkam in Allentown, Pa., contributed to this report.

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Plushnick-Masti can be followed on Twitter at https://twitter.com/RamitMastiAP

EPA & Hydraulic Fracturing - Jan. 17

EPA changed course after gas company protested
Observer-Reporter - Online

01/17/2013

Published Jan 16, 2013 at 11:21 pm (Updated Jan 16, 2013 at 11:21 pm)

In this Nov. 26 photo, Steve Lipsky pauses during an interview at his family's home in rural Parker County near Weatherford, Texas.

In a Nov. 26 photo, a road leads to a natural gas well near Weatherford, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence the gas company's drilling operation contaminated nearby families' drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving the families with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by the Associated Press.

WEATHERFORD, Texas – When a man in a Fort Worth suburb reported his family's drinking water had begun bubbling like champagne, the federal government sounded an alarm: A company may have tainted their wells while drilling for natural gas.

At first, the Environmental Protection Agency believed the situation was so serious that it issued a rare emergency order in late 2010 that said at least two homeowners were in immediate danger from a well saturated with flammable methane. More than a year later, the agency rescinded its mandate and refused to explain why.

Now a confidential report obtained by the Associated Press and interviews with company representatives show the EPA had scientific evidence against the driller, Range Resources, but changed course after the company threatened not to cooperate with a national study into a common form of drilling called hydraulic fracturing. Regulators set aside an analysis that concluded the drilling could have been to blame for the contamination.

For Steve Lipsky, the EPA decision seemed to ignore the dangers to his family. His water supply contains so much methane that the gas in water flowing from a pipe connected to the well can be ignited.

"I just can't believe that an agency that knows the truth about something like that, or has evidence like this, wouldn't use it," said Lipsky, who fears he will have to abandon his dream home in an upscale neighborhood of Weatherford.

The case isn't the first in which the EPA initially linked a hydraulic fracturing operation to water contamination and then softened its position after the industry protested.

A similar dispute unfolded in west-central Wyoming in late 2011, when the EPA released an initial report that showed hydraulic fracturing could have contaminated groundwater. After industry and GOP leaders went on the attack, the agency said it had decided to do more testing. It has yet to announce a final conclusion.

Hydraulic fracturing — often called "fracking" — allows drillers to tap into oil and gas reserves that were once considered out of reach because they were locked in deep layers of rock.

The method has contributed to a surge in natural gas drilling nationwide, but environmental activists and some scientists believe it can contaminate groundwater. The industry insists the practice is safe.

Range Resources, a leading independent player in the natural gas boom, has hundreds of gas wells throughout Texas, Pennsylvania and other mineral-rich areas of the United States. Among them is a production site — now owned by

EPA & Hydraulic Fracturing - Jan. 17

Legend Natural Gas — in a wooded area about a mile from Lipsky's home in Weatherford, about a half-hour drive west of Fort Worth.

State agencies usually regulate water and air pollution, so the EPA's involvement in the Texas matter was unusual from the start. The EPA began investigating complaints about the methane in December 2010, because it said the Texas Railroad Commission, which oversees oil and gas drilling, had not responded quickly enough to the reports of bubbling water.

Government scientists believed two families, including the Lipskys, were in danger from methane and cancer-causing benzene and ordered Range Resources to take steps to clean their water wells and provide affected homeowners with safe water. The company stopped doing that after state regulators declared in March 2011 that Range Resources was not responsible. The dispute between the EPA and the company then moved into federal court.

Believing the case was headed for a lengthy legal battle, the EPA asked an independent scientist named Geoffrey Thyne to analyze water samples taken from 32 water wells. In the report obtained by the AP, Thyne concluded from chemical testing that the gas in the drinking water could have originated from Range Resources' nearby drilling operation.

Meanwhile, the EPA was seeking industry leaders to participate in a national study into hydraulic fracturing. Range Resources told EPA officials in Washington that so long as the agency continued to pursue a "scientifically baseless" action against the company in Weatherford, it would not take part in the study and would not allow government scientists onto its drilling sites, said company attorney David Poole.

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CU-Boulder, NOAA study uncovers oil and gas emission's 'chemical signature' Longmont Times-Call - Online

01/17/2013

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Study finds that more than half of ozone-forming pollutants in Erie come from drilling activity

By John Aguilar Camera Staff Writer

dailycamera.com

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Oil and gas wells shown near Erie Community Park in March 2012.

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Matthew Jonas

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Emissions from oil and natural gas operations account for more than half of the pollutants -- such as propane and butane -- that contribute to ozone formation in Erie, according to a new scientific study published this week.

The study, the work of scientists at the Cooperative Institute for Research in Environmental Sciences at the University of Colorado, concluded that oil and gas activity contributed about 55 percent of the volatile organic compounds linked to unhealthy ground-level ozone in Erie.

Key to the findings was the recent discovery of a "chemical signature" that differentiates emissions from oil and gas activity from those given off by automobiles, cow manure or other sources of volatile organic compounds.

"There were very, very few data points that did not fall on the natural gas line," Jessica Gilman, research scientist at CIRES and lead author of the study, said Wednesday. "We had a very strong signature from the raw natural gas."

CIRES is a joint institute of CU and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Its study was published online Monday in the journal Environmental Science and Technology.

Emissions detected in Boulder

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The air quality monitoring effort, dubbed the Boulder Atmospheric Observatory, was conducted in February and March of 2011 on a tower set up a couple of miles east of downtown Erie.

It showed that, on average, Erie had highly elevated levels of propane in its air -- 10 times the levels found in famously smoggy Pasadena, Calif., and four times those in Houston. The results prompted town leaders last year to place a six-month moratorium on new drilling applications while they gathered additional information on the fast-growing industry.

But trying to determine exactly how much of Erie's propane was due to the thousands of gas wells located in and around town, and how much was due to the effects of being part of a major metropolitan area, was inexact at best.

Until now.

"What we saw at the Boulder Atmospheric Observatory was the mixing of two sources -- oil and gas and vehicles," Joost de Gouw, research physicist at CIRES, said. "For each compound, we can separate how much came from oil and gas and how much came from vehicles."

The researchers arrived at the unique chemical signature by analyzing the chemical makeup of all their air samples, characterizing 53 different types of volatile organic compounds and comparing the results to the composition of raw natural gas.

"We estimate 55 percent of the compounds contributing to ozone formation in Erie are from oil and gas," de Gouw said.

And it's not just Erie that is affected by oil and gas activity, which has exploded in recent years in the gigantic Wattenberg Gas Field northeast of Denver. The study showed that scientists found the telltale signs of drilling emissions in air samples taken in Fort Collins and Boulder, albeit in lesser amounts.

"Air pollution can travel many, many miles downwind from the source," Gilman said. "Air doesn't stop at any border."

Health effects in dispute

But whether emissions from oil and gas activity are endangering human health on a wide scale continues to be fiercely debated. Multiple families in Erie and around the state have complained that living so close to wells has made them sick, with nosebleeds, asthma and headaches as common symptoms.

But two studies commissioned by the town last year concluded that the levels of propane in Erie weren't concerning.

One environmental consulting firm concluded that even a lifetime exposure to the concentrations cited in the CIRES study would have a "low" risk of causing adverse health effects. A second firm stated that the town's propane levels were "1,000-fold or more below those considered to be of health concern."

Doug Flanders, spokesman for the Colorado Oil and Gas Association, wrote in an email Wednesday that Denver's air quality is "much better" than that of Houston or Los Angeles.

"December 2012 EPA data show Denver-area smog levels are well below those of Houston or Los Angeles," he wrote.

Gordon Pierce, technical services program manager for the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment's air pollution control division, said the state put in place stricter ozone controls in 2006 and 2008 for the oil and gas industry.

New control requirements were established for condensate tanks and new reporting and record-keeping requirements were also implemented. Late last year, Pierce said, the state adopted new EPA rules regarding emissions at gas wells.

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But he said his agency will continue to monitor the effects of the industry in Colorado, which now has more than 50,000 active wells.

There may not be proven health effects from individual volatile organic compounds, Pierce said, but when those compounds are combined with nitrogen oxides from vehicle tailpipes and baked in the sun, they form ozone. At ground level, ozone can cause breathing difficulties and eye irritations, especially among the young and elderly.

He said it's possible that if a strong enough link is established between oil and gas operations and high levels of ozone, the state could pursue stronger regulatory measures.

"We're always looking at different strategies for reducing ozone," Pierce said.

Pointing to Weld County

In the meantime, anti-drilling activists such as Jen Palazzolo plan to use the CIRES study's findings to once again put pressure on Erie's elected leaders to be tougher on oil and gas operators in town. Palazzolo is a leader of Erie Rising, a group that has strongly resisted oil and gas drilling in Erie.

"The study supports information that we've been trying to put out and that the industry has been trying to shoot down," she said. "There's no way you can argue against the fact that oil and gas contributes to ozone precursors."

After its drilling moratorium expired in September, Erie entered into memoranda of understanding with two operators that require them to use steel-rim berms around tanks and separators, closed-loop systems for drilling and completion operations, and a more effective vapor recovery unit for new wells. The companies also agreed not to use hydraulic fracturing fluid products that contain diesel, 2-Butoxyethanol or benzene.

But Palazzolo and others opposed to the industry say those agreements don't do nearly enough to protect the public health.

"It's time for us to re-address this with the Erie Board of Trustees and ask them if they are going to continue approving the number of oil and gas operations that are planned in town," she said.

Erie Trustee Mark Gruber said the town has done just about all it can on the issue, given the reality that control over the industry rests with the state and not local communities. Furthermore, he wonders how effective additional restrictions would be given the fact that the science indicates that volatile organic compounds are windborne and travel long distances.

"By and large, the contamination we see -- if it's in Erie, I'm going to point to Weld County," he said. "We're between a rock and a hard place. We've got 300 wells, they've got 19,000. We can't build a wall to stop the emissions coming from Weld County."

The county had 19,799 active wells as of last week, and in 2012 saw 1,826 well permits approved, representing 48 percent of all permits approved statewide that year.

Weld County Commissioner Sean Conway said his county works closely with state health authorities on ensuring the cleanest footprint from oil and gas operations. Ninety-five to 98 percent of emissions are being captured by the industry now, he said, and ozone levels have actually decreased in his county over the last few years.

Still, he said he welcomes the news this week that emissions from the oil and gas industry can be specifically traced by their chemical makeup. He said it could serve as a powerful tool for dealing with the industry from a factual standpoint,

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"If they are able to identify this now, it will give us a good starting point in identifying what are the actual impacts of this and how we go about ensuring public health and safety," Conway said.

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CU-Boulder, NOAA study uncovers oil and gas emission's 'chemical signature'
Daily Camera - Online, The

01/17/2013

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WCBD-TV - Online

01/17/2013

By: RAMIT PLUSHNICK-MASTI | Associated Press

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Lipsky, who is still tied up in a legal battle with Range Resources, now pays about $1,000 a month to haul water to his home. He, his wife and three children become unnerved when their methane detectors go off. Sometime soon, he said, the family will have to decide whether to stay in the large stone house or move.

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EPA & Hydraulic Fracturing - Jan. 17

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EPA & Hydraulic Fracturing - Jan. 17

EPA changed course after gas company protested
Gateway News - Online

01/17/2013

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EPA & Hydraulic Fracturing - Jan. 17

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Meanwhile, the EPA was seeking industry leaders to participate in a national study into hydraulic fracturing. Range Resources told EPA officials in Washington that so long as the agency continued to pursue a "scientifically baseless" action against the company in Weatherford, it would not take part in the study and would not allow government scientists onto its drilling sites, said company attorney David Poole.

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EPA & Hydraulic Fracturing - Jan. 17

EPA backed off drilling probe into foul water
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette - Online

01/17/2013

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January 17, 2013 12:01 am

By Ramit Plushnick-Masti / The Associated Press

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Now, a confidential report obtained by The Associated Press and interviews with company representatives show that the EPA had scientific evidence against the driller, Range Resources, but changed course after the firm threatened not to cooperate with a national study into a common form of drilling called hydraulic fracturing, or fracking. Regulators set aside an analysis that concluded that the drilling could have been to blame for the contamination.

For Steve Lipsky, the EPA decision seemed to ignore the dangers to his family. His water supply contains so much methane that the gas in water flowing from a pipe connected to the well can be ignited. "I just can't believe that an agency that knows the truth about something like that, or has evidence like this, wouldn't use it," said Mr. Lipsky, who fears that he will have to abandon his dream home in an upscale neighborhood of Weatherford.

The case isn't the first in which the EPA initially linked a fracking operation to water contamination and then softened its position after the industry protested. A similar dispute unfolded in west-central Wyoming in late 2011, when the EPA released an initial report that showed the drilling process could have contaminated groundwater. After industry and Republican leaders went on the attack, the agency said it had decided to do more testing. It has yet to announce a final conclusion.

Hydraulic fracturing -- "fracking" -- allows drillers to tap into oil and gas reserves once considered out of reach because they were locked in deep layers of rock. The method has contributed to a surge in natural gas drilling nationwide. But environmental activists and some scientists believe that it can contaminate groundwater. The industry insists that the practice is safe.

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First Published January 17, 2013 12:00 am

EPA & Hydraulic Fracturing - Jan. 17

AP: EPA Buried Fracking Evidence at Drilling Company's Behest Truthdig

01/17/2013

Posted on Jan 16, 2013

The Environmental Protection Agency may be making evidence of water contamination caused by hydraulic fracturing disappear to satisfy the drilling industry and lawmakers.

The Associated Press has learned of at least two cases in which the agency decided to re-evaluate its toxic findings after receiving outside pressure.

In the case of one Fort Worth, Texas, area family, the EPA rescinded an emergency order related to methane in the water supply after a drilling company threatened not to join a national study on fracking.

One of the major concerns about fracking, a process of extracting oil from formerly impenetrable underground rock, is that the slurry of toxic chemicals involved can make local water undrinkable. Other concerns include the potential for earthquakes and the continued burning of fossil fuels, which are cooking the planet.

The Associated Press via Google:

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Salon.com

01/17/2013

By By Ramit Plushnick-masti, Associated Press

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For Steve Lipsky, the EPA decision seemed to ignore the dangers in his well, which he says contains so much methane that the gas in water pouring out of a garden hose can be ignited.

"I just can't believe that an agency that knows the truth about something like that, or has evidence like this, wouldn't use it," said Lipsky, who fears he will have to abandon his dream home in an upscale neighborhood of Weatherford.

The case isn't the first in which the EPA initially linked a hydraulic fracturing operation to water contamination and then softened its position after the industry protested.

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WNCT-TV - Online

01/17/2013

RAMIT PLUSHNICK-MASTI

Associated Press

Published: January 16, 2013 Updated: January 16, 2013 - 10:25 PM

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Lipsky, who is still tied up in a legal battle with Range Resources, now pays about $1,000 a month to haul water to his home. He, his wife and three children become unnerved when their methane detectors go off. Sometime soon, he said, the family will have to decide whether to stay in the large stone house or move.

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"This has been total hell," Lipsky said. "It's been taking a huge toll on my family and on our life."

The confidential report relied on a type of testing known as isotopic analysis, which produces a unique chemical fingerprint that sometimes allows researchers to trace the origin of gas or oil.

Jackson, who studies hydraulic fracturing and specializes in isotopic analysis, acknowledged that more data is needed to determine for certain where the gas came from. But even if the gas came from elsewhere, Range Resources' drilling could have contributed to the problem in Lipsky's water because gas migrates, he added.

The company insists the gas in Lipsky's water is from natural migration and not drilling. Range Resources' testing indicates the gas came from a different rock formation called Strawn shale and not the deeper Barnett shale, Poole said.

In addition, he said, isotopic analysis cannot be used in this case because the chemical makeup of the gases in the two formations is indistinguishable. A Range Resources spokesman also dismissed Thyne and Jackson as anti-industry.

Range Resources has not shared its data with the EPA or the Railroad Commission. Poole said the data is proprietary and could only be seen by Houston-based Weatherford Laboratories, where it originated. It was analyzed for Range Resources by a Weatherford scientist, Mark McCaffrey, who did not respond to requests for an interview.

Gas has always been in the water in that area, Poole said. And years before Range Resources began drilling, at least one water well in the neighborhood contained so much methane, it went up in flames.

At another home with dangerously high methane levels in the water, the company insisted the gas had been there since the well was first dug many years ago. The homeowner was not aware of anything wrong until Range Resources began drilling in 2009.

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EPA changed course after gas company protested
Dayton Daily News - Online

01/17/2013

In this Nov. 26, 2012 photo, Steve Lipsky demonstrates how his well water ignites when he puts a flame to the flowing well spigot outside his family's home in rural Parker County near Weatherford, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence a gas company's drilling operation contaminated Lipsky's drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving the family with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions. (AP Photo/LM Otero)

In this Nov. 27, 2012 photo, a well vent burns as water flows from Steve Lipsky's well outside his family's home in rural Parker County near Weatherford, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence a gas company's drilling operation contaminated Lipsky's drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving the family with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or ìfracking,î operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions. (AP Photo/LM Otero)

In this Nov. 26, 2012 photo, Steve Lipsky pauses during an interview at his family's home in rural Parker County near Weatherford, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence a gas company's drilling operation contaminated Lipsky's drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving the family with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions. (AP Photo/LM Otero)

In this Nov. 26, 2012 photo, Steve Lipsky pauses during an interview at his family's home in rural Parker County near Weatherford, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence a gas company's drilling operation contaminated Lipsky's drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving the family with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or ìfracking,î operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions. (AP Photo/LM Otero)

This Dec. 6, 2012 aerial photo shows a natural gas well, top, in rural Parker County near Granbury, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence the gas company's drilling operation contaminated nearby drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving households with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions.

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(AP Photo/LM Otero)

In a Nov. 26, 2012 photo, a road leads to a natural gas well near Weatherford, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence the gas company's drilling operation contaminated nearby families' drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving the families with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions. (AP Photo/LM Otero)

In this Nov. 27, 2012 photo, water flowing from Steve Lipsky's well ignites when he puts a flame to the well spigot outside his family's home in rural Parker County near Weatherford, Texas. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency had evidence a gas company's drilling operation contaminated Lipsky's drinking water with explosive methane, and possibly cancer-causing chemicals, but withdrew its enforcement action, leaving the family with no useable water supply, according to a report obtained by The Associated Press. The EPA's decision to roll back its initial claim that hydraulic fracturing, or "fracking," operations had contaminated the water is the latest case in which the federal agency initially linked drilling to water contamination and then softened its position, drawing criticism from Republicans and industry officials who insisted they proved the agency was inefficient and too quick to draw conclusions. (AP Photo/LM Otero)

When a man in a Fort Worth suburb reported his family's drinking water had begun bubbling like champagne, the federal government sounded an alarm: A company may have tainted their wells while drilling for natural gas.

At first, the Environmental Protection Agency believed the situation was so serious that it issued a rare emergency order in late 2010 that said at least two homeowners were in immediate danger from a well saturated with flammable methane. More than a year later, the agency rescinded its mandate and refused to explain why.

Now a confidential report obtained by The Associated Press and interviews with company representatives show that the EPA had scientific evidence against the driller, Range Resources, but changed course after the company threatened not to cooperate with a national study into a common form of drilling called hydraulic fracturing. Regulators set aside an analysis that concluded the drilling could have been to blame for the contamination.

For Steve Lipsky, the EPA decision seemed to ignore the dangers to his family. His water supply contains so much methane that the gas in water flowing from a pipe connected to the well can be ignited.

"I just can't believe that an agency that knows the truth about something like that, or has evidence like this, wouldn't use it," said Lipsky, who fears he will have to abandon his dream home in an upscale neighborhood of Weatherford.

The case isn't the first in which the EPA initially linked a hydraulic fracturing operation to water contamination and then softened its position after the industry protested.

A similar dispute unfolded in west-central Wyoming in late 2011, when the EPA released an initial report that showed hydraulic fracturing could have contaminated groundwater. After industry and GOP leaders went on the attack, the agency said it had decided to do more testing. It has yet to announce a final conclusion.

Hydraulic fracturing — often called "fracking" — allows drillers to tap into oil and gas reserves that were once considered out of reach because they were locked in deep layers of rock.

The method has contributed to a surge in natural gas drilling nationwide, but environmental activists and some scientists believe it can contaminate groundwater. The industry insists the practice is safe.

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Range Resources, a leading independent player in the natural gas boom, has hundreds of gas wells throughout Texas, Pennsylvania and other mineral-rich areas of the United States. Among them is a production site — now owned by Legend Natural Gas — in a wooded area about a mile from Lipsky's home in Weatherford, about a half-hour drive west of Fort Worth.

State agencies usually regulate water and air pollution, so the EPA's involvement in the Texas matter was unusual from the start. The EPA began investigating complaints about the methane in December 2010, because it said the Texas Railroad Commission, which oversees oil and gas drilling, had not responded quickly enough to the reports of bubbling water.

Government scientists believed two families, including the Lipskys, were in danger from methane and cancer-causing benzene and ordered Range Resources to take steps to clean their water wells and provide affected homeowners with safe water. The company stopped doing that after state regulators declared in March 2011 that Range Resources was not responsible. The dispute between the EPA and the company then moved into federal court.

Believing the case was headed for a lengthy legal battle, the EPA asked an independent scientist named Geoffrey Thyne to analyze water samples taken from 32 water wells. In the report obtained by the AP, Thyne concluded from chemical testing that the gas in the drinking water could have originated from Range Resources' nearby drilling operation.

Meanwhile, the EPA was seeking industry leaders to participate in a national study into hydraulic fracturing. Range Resources told EPA officials in Washington that so long as the agency continued to pursue a "scientifically baseless" action against the company in Weatherford, it would not take part in the study and would not allow government scientists onto its drilling sites, said company attorney David Poole.

In March 2012, the EPA retracted its emergency order, halted the court battle and set aside Thyne's report showing that the gas in Lipsky's water was nearly identical to the gases the Plano, Texas-based company was producing.

"They said that they would look into it, which I believe is exactly what they did," Poole said. "I'm proud of them. As an American, I think that's exactly what they should have done."

The EPA offered no public explanation for its change in thinking, and Lipsky said he and his family learned about it from a reporter. The agency refused to answer questions about the decision, instead issuing a statement by email that said resolving the Range Resources matter allowed the EPA to shift its "focus in this case away from litigation and toward a joint effort on the science and safety of energy extraction."

After the agency dropped its action, the company offered scientists access to a site in southwestern Pennsylvania. But the EPA has not yet accepted the offer.

Rob Jackson, chairman of global environmental change at Duke University's Nicholas School of the Environment, reviewed Thyne's report and the raw data upon which it was based. He agreed the gas in Lipsky's well could have originated in a rock formation known as the Barnett shale, the same area where Range Resources was extracting gas.

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At another home with dangerously high methane levels in the water, the company insisted the gas had been there since the well was first dug many years ago. The homeowner was not aware of anything wrong until Range Resources began drilling in 2009.

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Associated Press writers Nomaan Merchant in Dallas, Allen Breed in Raleigh, N.C., and Michael Rubinkam in Allentown, Pa., contributed to this report.

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Obama EPA Shut Down Study on Fracking Water Contamination in Texas
DAILY KOS

01/17/2013

The Associated Press has a breaking investigative story out today revealing that the Obama Administration's Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) censored a smoking gun scientific report in March 2012 that it had contracted out to a scientist who conducted field data on 32 water samples in Weatherford, TX.

That report, according to the AP, would have explicitly linked methane migration to hydraulic fracturing ("fracking") in Weatherford, a city with 25,000+ citizens located in the heart of the Barnett Shale geologic formation 30 minutes from Dallas.

It was authored by Geoffrey Thyne, a geologist formerly on the faculty of the Colorado School of Mines and University of Wyoming before departing from the latter for a job in the private sector working for Interralogic Inc. in Ft Collins, CO.

Cross-Posted from DeSmogBlog

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This isn't the first time Thyne's scientific research has been shoved aside, either. Thyne wrote two landmark studies on groundwater contamination in Garfield County, CO, the first showing that it existed, the second confirming that the contamination was directly linked to fracking in the area.

It's the second study that got him in trouble.

"Thyne says he was told to cease his research by higher-ups. He didn't," The Checks and Balances Project explained. " And when it came to renew his contract, Thyne was cut loose."

From Smoking Gun to Censorship: Range Resources Link

The Obama EPA's Weatherford, TX study was long-in-the-making, with its orgins actually dating back to a case of water contamination in 2010. The victim: Steve Lipsky.

"At first, the Environmental Protection Agency believed the situation was so serious that it issued a rare emergency order in late 2010 that said at least two homeowners were in immediate danger from a well saturated with flammable methane," the AP wrote.

AP proceeded to explain that Lipsky had "reported his family's drinking water had begun 'bubbling' like champagne" and that his "well...contains so much methane that the...water [is] pouring out of a garden hose [that] can be ignited."

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The driller in this case was a corporation notorious for intimidating local communities and governmental officials at all levels of governance: Range Resources. Range, in this case, set up shop for shale gas production in a "wooded area about a mile from Lipsky's home," according to the AP.

As DeSmogBlog revealed in November 2011, Range Resources utilizes psychological warfare techniques as part of its overarching public relations strategy.

Due to the grave health concerns associated with the presence of methane and benzene in drinking water, the Obama EPA "ordered Range...to take steps to clean their water wells and provide affected homeowners with safe water," wrote the AP.

Range's response? It "threatened not to cooperate" with the Obama EPA's study on fracking's link to water contamination. The non-cooperation lead to the Obama EPA suing Range Resources.

It was during this phase of the struggle where things got interesting. As the AP explained,

Believing the case was headed for a lengthy legal battle, the Obama EPA asked an independent scientist named Geoffrey Thyne to analyze water samples taken from 32 water wells. In the report obtained by the AP, Thyne concluded from chemical testing that the gas in the drinking water could have originated from Range Resources' nearby drilling operation. Despite this smoking gun, everything was soon shut down, with the Obama EPA reversing its emergency order, terminating the court battle and censoring Thyne's report. The AP explained that the Obama EPA has "refused to answer questions about the decision."

"I just can't believe that an agency that knows the truth about something like that, or has evidence like this, wouldn't use it," Lipsky, who now pays $1,000 a month to have water hauled to his family's house, told the AP.

"Duke Study" Co-Author Confirms Veracity of Thyne's Study

Robert Jackson, a Professor of Global Environmental Change at Duke University and co-author of the "Duke Study" linking fracking to groundwater contamination did an independent peer review of Thyne's censored findings. He found that it is probable that the methane in Lipsky's well water likely ended up there thanks to the fracking process.

Range predictably dismissed Thyne and Jackson as "anti-industry."

Americans Against Fracking: An "Unconscionable" Decision

Americans Against Fracking summed up the situation best in a scathing press release:

It is unconscionable that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), which is tasked with safeguarding our nation's vital natural resources, would fold under pressure to the oil and gas industry...It is again abundantly clear that the deep pocketed oil and gas industry will stop at nothing to protect its own interests, even when mounting scientific evidence shows that drilling and fracking pose a direct threat to vital drinking water supplies. There's also a tragic human side to this tale.

"This has been total hell," Lipsky told the AP. "It's been taking a huge toll on my family and on our life."

Originally posted to Steve Horn on Wed Jan 16, 2013 at 01:41 PM PST.

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EPA BACKED OFF DRILLING PROBE INTO FOUL WATER
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

01/17/2013

WEATHERFORD, Texas -- When a suburban Fort Worth man reported that his family's drinking water had begun bubbling like champagne, the federal government sounded an alarm: A company may have tainted their wells while drilling for natural gas.

At first, the Environmental Protection Agency believed that the situation was so serious that it issued a rare emergency order in late 2010 that said at least two homeowners were in immediate danger from a well saturated with flammable methane. More than a year later, the agency rescinded its mandate and refused to explain why.

Now, a confidential report obtained by The Associated Press and interviews with company representatives show that the EPA had scientific evidence against the driller, Range Resources, but changed course after the firm threatened not to cooperate with a national study into a common form of drilling called hydraulic fracturing, or fracking. Regulators set aside an analysis that concluded that the drilling could have been to blame for the contamination.

For Steve Lipsky, the EPA decision seemed to ignore the dangers to his family. His water supply contains so much methane that the gas in water flowing from a pipe connected to the well can be ignited. "I just can't believe that an agency that knows the truth about something like that, or has evidence like this, wouldn't use it," said Mr. Lipsky, who fears that he will have to abandon his dream home in an upscale neighborhood of Weatherford.

The case isn't the first in which the EPA initially linked a fracking operation to water contamination and then softened its position after the industry protested. A similar dispute unfolded in west-central Wyoming in late 2011, when the EPA released an initial report that showed the drilling process could have contaminated groundwater. After industry and Republican leaders went on the attack, the agency said it had decided to do more testing. It has yet to announce a final conclusion.

Hydraulic fracturing -- "fracking" -- allows drillers to tap into oil and gas reserves once considered out of reach because they were locked in deep layers of rock. The method has contributed to a surge in natural gas drilling nationwide. But environmental activists and some scientists believe that it can contaminate groundwater. The industry insists that the practice is safe.

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State agencies usually regulate water and air pollution, so the EPA's involvement in the Texas matter was unusual from the start. The EPA began investigating complaints about the methane in December 2010, because it said the Texas Railroad Commission, which oversees oil and gas drilling, had not responded quickly enough to the reports of bubbling water.

Believing that the case was headed for a lengthy legal battle, the EPA asked independent scientist Geoffrey Thyne to analyze water samples from 32 water wells. In his report, Mr. Thyne concluded by chemical testing that the gas in the drinking water could have originated from Range Resources' nearby drilling.

Meanwhile, the EPA was seeking industry leaders to participate in a national study of fracking. Range Resources told

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EPA officials in Washington that so long as the agency continued to pursue a "scientifically baseless" action against it in Weatherford, the company would not take part in the study and would not allow government scientists onto its drilling sites, company attorney David Poole said.

In March 2012, the EPA retracted its emergency order and halted the court battle.

The EPA offered no public explanation for its change in thinking.

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